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TAGS: PREL PHUM KUNR AORC UNGA UN IR  
SUBJECT: UN REFORM: U/S BURNS SEES GA PRESIDENT ELIASSON  
DURING THE HRC VOTE

Classified By: Ambassador Alex Wolff, Deputy Permanent Representative,  
for reasons 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Summary. U/S Burns called on GA President Eliasson during a break in the HRC voting on Tuesday, May 9. Eliasson was clearly energized by the results of the voting and expressed his hope that the U.S. would be "encouraged" by the process. Both agreed that the proof of positive change would be in the voting practices of the members. Eliasson advocated using the new peer review and pledge process to hold members to a higher standard. On reform, Eliasson said it was the worst atmosphere for reform that he has ever experienced, but suggested that the U.S. and its partners lay out a realistic set of objectives prior to the June expiration of the spending cap. He thought that the G-77's fear of the looming budget debate was driving their current aggressive posture. U/S Burns pressed the UN reform agenda and said we would work to close the divisions with the G-77 and other member states but needed to see tangible evidence that the G-77 will meet us halfway. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns met with an elated General Assembly President, Jan Eliasson, and staff in between the final rounds of voting for the Human Rights Council (HRC) membership on Tuesday, May 9. Eliasson was joined by a large number of his staff, including Chief of Staff Lars Wide. U/S Burns was accompanied by USUN Deputy PR Alex Wolff, P Special Assistant Stefanie Amadeo and a USUN notetaker.

¶3. (C) Eliasson was visibly pleased by the results of the HRC vote. "I hope it will facilitate your decision next year," he said, remarking that the mechanism had succeeded in keeping some of the worst offenders off the Council. He noted that Iran had gotten less than 60 votes, and he claimed that the process had demonstrated that Venezuela's attempt to become "a leader of the third world" through a campaign of anti-Americanism was a failure. Beyond the vote tally, Eliasson emphasized that the new mechanism had generated some measure of self-policing within the regional groups, particularly Africa, that had prevented some of the worst offenders from standing for election. The Council would not be without blemishes, he admitted. But with members like Saudi Arabia, it would be important to take advantage of leverage provided by the pledges made by candidates and the process of peer review of members. U/S Burns noted that the election of Cuba was a great disappointment to us. Eliasson stressed the importance of establishing good working methods and encouraged U.S. diplomats to be fully engaged in Geneva. U/S Burns said the U.S. would be fully involved, but the proof of the new process would be in the voting practices of the members.

¶4. (C) U/S Burns asked Eliasson how the pro-reform forces in the UN should respond in the wake of the May 8 GA vote that dealt a sharp blow to the Secretary-General's reform agenda.

Eliasson recommended that "we leave this chapter behind us." He thought that the majority of interventions following the May 8 vote were positive and forward-looking, and it would be a mistake to keep rehashing that debate. Instead, he suggested that the reform advocates need to agree on a package that is "realistic to achieve" in advance of the June expiration of the spending cap imposed on the Secretariat last year. The French and the Japanese, he claimed, have proposals in this regard that could serve as a basis for agreement. Progress on these reform objectives would also have to be complemented by progress on the ECOSOC reform and development implementation resolutions, both of which are of continued interest to the G-77.

¶15. (C) Eliasson stressed the need for confidence-building measures between the developed and the developing world. He said that he had never before felt such an urgent need for reform of the UN, but he had paradoxically never experienced a worse atmosphere in which to do it. The expiration of the spending cap is a critical moment for G-77 states, who worry that the U.S., Japan and the EU will use its expiration to press for the strongest demands. Eliasson thought this explained why the G-77 was so clearly "flexing its muscles" right now.

¶16. (C) U/S Burns then briefed Eliasson on the ongoing discussions related to Iran's defiance of the international community over its nuclear program. Eliasson, noting that he had served as a mediator during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, asked if there was "any sort of diplomacy that might be conducted." U/S Burns responded that there were many avenues of diplomacy open to the Iranians, including with the EU and Russia, but it was Tehran that had chosen a defiant path.

¶17. (U) U/S Burns has reviewed this cable.

BOLTON